Youth 2012 Winter Retreat

Join Other Youth for the 2012 Winter Youth Retreat

January 13-16, 2012 *at the* Blowing Rock Conference Center

Blowing Rock, North Carolina

This is a special invitation to all youth, ages 6th grade through 12th grade in the Southern and the Southeast Conferences of the United Church of Christ to register for this amazing event!

You are Invited!

Last year at the Annual Winter Youth Retreat, over 150 youth and adults from the Southern and Southeast Conferences of the UCC gathered together to take a closer look at **"PeaceMakers: Nurturing Peace Within."**

This year we will turn our attention to **"Justice Makers: A Call to Action"** and will let Micah 6:6-8 be our guide for understanding more fully what it means to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. ***"Come have FUN in the SNOW!"***

Here's What May Interest You:

Featured Leaders:

Rev. Kelly J. Burd | Rev. Shernell J. Edney | Daniel A. Heath

Stretch your spiritual muscles and enjoy meeting new friends.

Registration + Itinerary:

Link here for complete registration information and forms.

Link here for the weekend's itinerary.

Fees:

Make sure you take advantage of the ***"Early Bird Registration."***
Following are key registration dates for savings on a great winter weekend.

Postmarked by - 11.25.11 | **$155.00**

Postmarked by - 11.26.11 - 12.16.11 | **$175.00**

Postmarked after - 12.17.11 | **$200.00**

Please register ASAP with Rev. Kristin Gerner Vaughn.

Blowing Rock, North Carolina is calling your youth!
Follow this link for registration forms and additional event information.

This sounds like a great time for all, youth, youth leaders and pastors.
Start the new year off by having fun in the snow!

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A Word From Tim Downs - December 2011

Dear Friends,

Joy to the World!

I am writing to you in the middle of Advent, mindful that we Christians living in the rhythms of the liturgical year are once again out of sync with the world arouafter Thanksgiving and as the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Plaza burst into light and the choir sang "Joy to the World, the Lord is come!" I thought "No! No! Not yet, not just yet!" We need to sing first "come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free…"

Advent is sometimes called "the little Lent", it is a time to linger, a gift of reflection on the magnitude of God's promise to us in the Christ child, a gift magnified by the world's brokenness, by those "who mourn in lonely exile here…". This Advent my heart has turned to the many that have been touched by the ministries of outreach, advocacy, and healing, you, the churches of the Southeast Conference have undertaken. There are the families of people imprisoned who are driven to visit their loved ones, and many of our churches that have opened their doors and embraced folk who have been turned away from other communities of faith. We have churches in Alabama making a bold witness to immigrants, including the undocumented, knowing that we are called to welcome the sojourner. You have fed the hungry, tutored those longing for knowledge, and touched many who have lost their homes and communities to disaster. You, the churches of the Southeast Conference together gathered truckloads of food, wrote thousands of letters of advocacy, and gave thousands of dollars to bring hope to the hungry through Mission 1.

By these and many other acts of caring love and justice, you have carried the light of Christ into the shadowed corners of the world around us. You have been an Advent people in wonderful and faithful ways, and I am deeply grateful for your witness. You will receive this letter from me on as we are taking the final steps toward the stable. The staff of the Southeast Conference and I wish you all a Christmas of wonder and

joy as we stand together at the manger marveling at the God who comes to us through a crying infant.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Tim Downs
Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

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Kirkwood and Mission 1:11

New Atlanta Church Dares to Embrace Big Mission:1 Goals

Written by Gregg Brekke | November 3, 2011

Atlanta's Kirkwood UCC has taken on the Mission:1 challenge with passion, outreach, education and a dare.

Recently received as a new United Church of Christ congregation with full st
anding in the Southeast Conference, Kirkwood UCC isn't resting on this recent milestone of the church.

"We decided to add an extra Soup Saturday meal during Mission:1," says Kirkwood member Amy Rush of the church's twice monthly community meal. "It's a chance for us to meet people from our neighborhood — around 25 each week."

In addition to the meal, Kirkwood also offers guests the opportunity to "shop" for warm and new clothes, and receive supplies from the church's food pantry, on Soup Saturdays.

Kirkwood UCC kids from the James family gather around the 30+ food items they are donating to Mission:1 efforts. (Photo left)

Rush says that six additional volunteers have begun working at Soup Saturdays. This is over half way toward the congregation's goal of having 11 new workers in the outreach ministry.

With Mission:1 as the backdrop to many outreach and giving opportunities, Rush says that Kirkwood members caught the spirit and began daring one another to up their donation ante.

"One person posted on our Facebook page that she could bring 30 items and challenged others to do the same," says Rush. "Someone then posted that she'd bring 30+1 and I posted that I'd bring 30+2. I believe the latest pledge was 45 items. We're well on our way to our goal of 1,111 healthy food items for our own Community Table Food Pantry."

The church's goal of $211 toward the Neighbors in Need offering has already been exceeded by an anonymous donation of $1,111. "Isn't that fantastic?" exclaims Rush.

But Kirkwood members have also embraced advocacy and education as key elements of their Mission:1 goals.

On Nov. 8, Kirkwood UCC will join Praxis UCC of Atlanta to host an Oxfam Hunger Banquet. Attendees will bring 11 food items or donate $11 toward the churches' shared Mission:1 goals in addition to working toward completing 51 pledged letters to Congress.

The group will also show two documentaries to accompany the meal: Silent Killer - The Unfinished Campaign Against Hunger and Chicken a la Cart.

"It has become clearer and clearer that, at least for our community, food is a HUGE issue — having enough food to sustain a person and having healthy food to eat," says the Rev. Susannah Davis, pastor of Kirkwood UCC. "We are so

thankful to be a part of the UCC. Dreams and visions like Mission:1 gather us all in and give us opportunity to share the best of who we are and who God is calling us to be!"

From Nov. 1-11, 2011 (11-1-11—11-11-11), the UCC's goals are to collect more than 1 million food and household items for local food banks, as well as $111,111 in online donations for hunger-related ministries and $111,111 in online donations for East Africa famine relief. The UCC also is asking its 5,300 congregations to advocate for hunger-related causes worldwide via 11,111 letters to Congress.

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Central Congregational UCC visits Stewart Detention Center

On Oct. 1, 2011 a small group from Central Congregational UCC traveled to the Steward Detention Center in Lumpkin, Ga. (some three hours from Atlanta)....where nearly 2,000 men - immigrants - are imprisoned because they are "undocumented". The "crime" for many of them was doing hard labor here at low pay for willing employers -- but with no residence papers.

The SDC is a bleak, depressing prison run by the Corrections Corporation of America for ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Our tax dollars pay for this, keeping men jailed for months awaiting a hearing or trial and/or deportation. The stories we heard from the men we visited were heart-rending – some families torn asunder; some men here in the U.S. since childhood who know no other country; some here a few years but hard-working and "innocent". The whole situation was sad – and is so unjust!

One positive thing in it all is that concerned Christians have established a small hospitality house a mile from the prison so when family members come to visit, many from as far away as N.C., they have a bed, meals and a warm welcome. It's called "El Refugio" and it is indeed "a refuge".

Our purpose was to visit and to bring cheer as well as to listen and learn – and then come back and tell the story and work for justice. We seek justice in the form of comprehensive, humane, immigration reform (and alternatives to detention) as well as urging support of El Refugio and related ministries of compassion and advocacy. May we at Central reach out and make a difference….

Written by Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown, October 17, 2011

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Disaster Relief in 2012

Disaster Relief Volunteers Needed

The United Church of Christ looks forward to working with National Disaster Ministries UCC / Wider Church Ministries and other local partners in the Birmingham area on repairing/rebuilding homes damaged by tornadoes earlier this year. There are a number of volunteer work groups who will be heading to Birmingham in 2012. Read the following letter from **Mary Schaller Blaufuss**, *Executive, UCC Volunteer Ministries,* and **Florence Coppola**, *Executive, UCC National Disaster Ministries*. There are many ways you can assist those in need.

Friends,
As you know and perhaps experienced where you live, this year there have been a number of disasters in the United States. Local communities are organizing to determine how to best address needs of people impacted. Birmingham, AL is now ready to receive volunteer work groups to assist with repairing/rebuilding homes. Three UCC local churches are offering housing to work groups. The UCC is partnering with the Central Alabama Long Term Recovery Committee and Habitat for Humanity in this recovery effort. Please see below the information on several other locations that have experienced disasters this year. As soon as any of these communities are ready to receive volunteer work groups that information will be sent to you and posted under Volunteer Ministries on the UCC web site. I have provided here the link to the Birmingham registration information. Please share this throughout your Conference. Thank you for your continuing support of disaster ministries.

Peace,

Florence

Visit the UCC Volunteer Ministries website

The following is additional information for disaster related mission trips.
Registration Open - Volunteers in Long-Term Disaster Recovery - Birmingham, Alabama
The stage of **Long-Term Recovery** has just begun - Registration is now open for groups to serve in Birmingham, AL during 2012.

Coming this spring and summer - probable group volunteer opportunities in long-term disaster recovery in New York state, Bismarck, North Dakota, Vermont, and Joplin, MO. Long Term Recovery committees have formed in these areas and are working. They are figuring out issues related to zoning and housing for groups, case management for home owners and financial resources available to rebuild. Some are at the point of hiring volunteer coordinators and local construction site coordinators. UCC national staff, along with members of the network of Conference Disaster Coordinators in each effected area, continue to consult closely with each local committee. As opportunities are available - we will notify you of the registration website.

In some locations, local communities decide to do disaster recovery using resources other than volunteer groups from outside the area. Bloomsburg, PA and Raleigh, NC are two such locations. The Penn Central Conference Disaster

Ministries team organized people to participate in service days in Bloomsburg during the fall. In Raleigh, NC, local UCC people will participate in service days on December 10 and December 17.

Volunteers in UCC Long-Term Disaster Recovery When a Disaster Happens - You in the UCC are involved through your contributions to **One Great Hour of Sharing** that are used to provide emergency grants to UCC churches, to assist local Long Term Recovery Organizations to form, and to coordinate with local UCC churches for providing housing. A network of UCC Disaster Coordinators appointed by their UCC conferences work with the Office for National Disaster Ministries in response to disasters in their region. For more information visit UCC Conference Disaster Coordinator website.

Long Term Disaster Recovery Organizations often take several months to form and ready themselves to receive volunteer groups to serve in long-term recovery efforts - far longer than the current U.S. news media cycle. The Long Term Recovery Organization makes use of existing religious, community social services and volunteer programs, as possible. It serves as a coordinating organization for the wide scope of disaster recovery needed in an effected community. The Long Term Recovery Organization provides case management for home-owners, building materials, tools, local construction site coordinator and local volunteer coordinator.
Local UCC churches are coordinated through UCC National Disaster and Volunteer Ministries offices to provide housing accommodations for groups as ministries of hospitality and UCC identity.

The **United Church of Christ** has a visible and active denominational presence in local affected communities through the centralized registration system that utilizes a UCC long-term **Partners in Service** volunteer serving as the UCC registrar. This system assists the local recovering community by providing a contact point for groups rather than the local volunteer coordinator responding to multiple requests. It also helps your group navigate the multiple contacts needed with the local long-term recovery committee and group housing.

Your continued contributions to **Our Church's Wider Mission**, **One Great Hour of Sharing**, and special appeals for particular disasters, such as the Spring Storms appeal, make possible the UCC participation in disaster recovery.

Thank you again for your wonderful commitment to serve others as God's people.

Peace,

Mary Schaller Blaufuss and Florence Coppola

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